Volume 4 Article 6

May 2014

# The Prospect and Progress of Rockwell Kent on Monhegan Island

Codi Lamb
*West Virginia University*

Rhonda Reymond
*West Virginia University*

**36**

# THE PROSPECT AND PROGRESS OF ROCKWELL KENT ON MONHEGAN ISLAND

**Codi Lamb** and **Rhonda Reymond**
**College of Creative Arts Art History, West Virginia University**

## Abstract

This capstone examines the artistic and personal impact Monhegan Island, Maine had on the artist Rockwell Kent (1882-1971). This is accomplished by evaluating what qualities Monhegan Island has that makes it an attractive location for an artist colony. Afterwards, focus will be directed towards Kent; specifically, a selection of landscape paintings from his residency on Monhegan Island (1905-1910; 1917; and 1947-1953), will be analyzed chronologically. They will be evaluated using Jay Appleton's prospect – refuge theory commenting on humans' interactions with particular environments. These analyses are then compared to personal events that occurred at the time the artwork in question was created. This information was collected using archives, journals, interviews, and books. When this is completed, the results show that Monhegan Island did in fact have a positive impact on Kent's artistic career and on his life, as this location influenced his future destinations.

The artist, Rockwell Kent (1882-1971), believed that "art is a by-product of living."1 This philosophy suggests it is important to take biographical significance into account when considering Kent's work. This paper will demonstrate that living on Monhegan Island, Maine, had an artistic, as well as a personal impact on Rockwell Kent. This claim will be analyzed by the use of the prospect-refuge theory developed by Jay Appleton in 1975. The framework of this theory identifies symbolical markers present in landscape environments. Many of the artworks that Kent produced while on Monhegan are landscape paintings, and by implementing this theory when examining Kent's work, his artwork reveals biographical information. The information analyzed from the paintings can be compared to the many other primary and secondary sources detailing Kent's life to determine its accuracy. Once these selected artworks have been analyzed and evaluated, it will be clear that Monhegan Island affected Rockwell Kent personally and artistically.

It is hard to fathom that Kent came close to not becoming an artist at all. Kent was exposed to the arts early in life by his aunt, Jo, who was a ceramics painter. He accompanied her on a journey to Europe at the age of thirteen. Then, in the summer of 1900, Kent attended the Shinnecock Hills art class in Long Island where William Merritt Chase taught. While here, Chase granted the young Kent a full scholarship to the New York School of Art.[2] Kent did not accept the proposal at this time, as his family believed that the occupation of an artist could not offer a satisfactory way of life.[3] He did not completely abandon his artistic talents but chose to use them in a different manner when he began to study architecture at Columbia University. Apparently, Kent was still not satisfied with his unexplored artistic skill. He accepted Chase's offer and began taking evening classes at the renamed Art Students League under the tutelage of Robert Henri and Kenneth Hayes Miller. Kent then made a bold commitment to his art when he quit Columbia in his final semester to focus on his studies as an artist. [4] The instructors at the Art Students League, particularly Robert Henri, are important to the works discussed in this paper, as their artistic The instructors at the Art Students League,

1 Rockwell Kent, *It's Me, O Lord: The Autobiography of Rockwell Kent* (New York: Dodd Mead Publishing, 1955), 148. 2 Constance M. Martin and Rockwell Kent, *Distant Shores: The Odyssey of Rockwell Kent,* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 13.

particularly Robert Henri, are important to the works discussed in this paper, as their artistic styles are not only present in Kent's early work, but it was Henri that introduced the idea of Monhegan Island to Kent. Robert Henri ventured to Monhegan Island during the summer of 1903 and strongly advocated that his students go there as well. Kent became the first of Henri's students to make the voyage during the summer of 1905, and then he made the island his permanent residence until his departure in 1910.[5]

Although Kent did not produce his first artwork on Monhegan, the island did inspire his first cohesive body of work. In fact, it has been noted that almost all of his series of paintings were completed on islands.[6] Monhegan was the first of these islands with locations such as Newfoundland, Tierra del Fuego, and Greenland, following. The characteristics of Monhegan Island appear in these future destinations. Monhegan influenced Kent's future decisions personally and artistically and suggests further investigations.

Monhegan Island is over six hundred miles of wilderness that sits just ten miles from the coast of Maine. In 1900, 94 residents were recorded on what was then referred to as Monhegan Plantation.[7] Today, the island has a little over seventy permanent residents, but this number swells to six hundred from the incoming of the part-time residents and artists during the summer months. Just as in the past, the sea is one of the main sources of income for the permanent residents, with many of them working as lobstermen. In 2004, it was documented that twelve of the seventy residents were lobstermen.[8]

Like other parts of the northeast, such as Ogunquit and Provincetown, Monhegan Island also developed an art colony. In 1858, Aaron Draper Shattuck, the first artist on record, arrived on the island by schooner. The villagers took note of his presence, and he often wrote letters from Monhegan speaking of his experiences.[9] An artist did not permanently settle on Monhegan until S.P. Rolt Triscott did in 1903.[10] It was not much later that Kent arrived on the island.

---

3 Rockwell Kent and Paul Cummings, "An Interview with Rockwell Kent Conducted by Paul Cummings at Austable Forks, New York, Febrauary 26-27, 1969," *Archives of American Art Journal* 12.1 (Jan. 1972): 10-11. 4 "An Interview with Rockwell Kent Conducted by Paul Cummings at Austable Forks, New York, Febrauary 26-27, 1969," 11.5 Fridolf Johnson, foreword to *Rockwell Kent: An Anthology of His Works* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 1982), 22-26. 6 Rockwell Kent and Edward L. Deci, *Rockwell Kent on Monhegan* (Monhegan, ME: Monhegan Museum, 1998), 16.

It is not a complete mystery as to why art colonies were so popular at this time. They allowed artists to venture out of the city and experience scenery that was more open and differed from what they encountered in their urban setting. However, for artists to make the trip by boat, as this is the only way to reach Monhegan, seems to be a bit extreme when there were many other locations for artists to choose from. Yet, the answer might not be as complex as the question seems. The island simply has so much to offer.

Even though the island is barely one square mile, the diversity of landscapes it offers is typically difficult to find in a compact space. Not only is the ocean, with its powerful waves, an attraction and a popular subject matter, but also bluffs, commonly referred to as headlands, are frequently featured in artwork. The island also contains what is commonly referred to as Cathedral Woods, a forested area that is today preserved by a land trust, the Monhegan Associates formed by Ted Edison, the son of Thomas Edison, to preserve the area from being sold and transformed into building lots in 1954.[11] The artists not only depicted the environmental aspects of the island, but also the village and the people that permanently inhabit the island were and still remain of interest to many artists due to their humble way of living. One thing has consistently fascinated artists - the quality of light. One active artist on the island even went so far as to say, "I think John Singer Sargent would have given his right arm for this light."[12] It was these factors that captivated Robert Henri and encouraged Rockwell Kent to experience Monhegan Island for himself. With the publication of his book, *The Experience of Landscape,* in 1975, Jay Appleton put into circulation the notion of prospect-refuge theory. The British geographer's work builds on Charles Darwin's habitat theory that hypothesized humans feel more secure or react to particular environments. According to Appleton, one of the main characteristics of prospect-refuge theory is that an environment should be secure or facilitate one's needs, such as shelter or safety, which is a prospect and a refuge. These two terms often compliment each other, as a prospect is

7 United States National Archives, 1900 Federal Census, Lincoln County, Maine, T623.1854 ED 169. 8 John Freeman Gill, "Through Artist's Eyes," *New York Times,* September 19, 2004, accessed November 2, 2012, http://travel.nytimes.com/2004/09/19/travel/19monhegan.html. 9 Patricia Harris and David Lyon, "Landscapes en plein air off Maine's Midcoast," *The Boston Globe,* August 27, 2006, accessed November 2, 2012, http://www.boston.com/travel/explorene/articles/2006/08/25/landscapes_en_plein_air_off_maines_midcoast/?page=full. 10 Thomas Andrew Denenberg and Amy Kurtz Lansing, *Call of the Coast: Art Colonies of New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 80.

the unobstructed opportunity to see without being seen because there is the opportunity for refuge or shelter.[13]

Appleton devotes a large portion of his book to prospect-refuge symbolism that is present in landscapes and how the symbols are exhibited, whether it is through landscape architecture or painting. This theory will be applied to Rockwell Kent's landscapes, focusing on how Kent perceived the landscape through his paintings. Appleton refers to this concept of prospect and refuge as not being about the objects themselves, but rather about what the objects reveal about how the viewer perceives his or her environment and how it is assessed in terms of behavioral opportunities.14 Monhegan Island exemplifies this idea of prospect and refuge, as Kent was able to be productive in his work with the comfort of being in a secluded location. This environment provided him the shelter and resources that are necessary for survival, while these same elements often became his subject matter.

Kent's emotion towards the island was instantaneous as he recounts the event of arriving on the island fifty years later in his autobiography, *It's Me, O Lord:* " . . . And like a puppy let out of his pen I'm off at a run to see, to climb, to touch and feel this wonder island that I've come to."15 This rush of emotion did not leave after he arrived. If anything, it could be said that it intensified. For Kent mentions that he began to work in frenzy, often not being able to sleep because he was painting. Although, it is likely the accounts discussed by Kent in his autobiography are true, it is possible that there was some embellishment used in his narratives or forgotten details as he was relying on his memory.

Potentially one of Kent's first paintings created on the island, *Harbor, Monhegan,* from 1905, is an oil on canvas that provides the scene from Monhegan's harbor looking out into the ocean. (Figure 1) This scene is stylistically similar to the work that he was producing prior to arriving on Monhegan Island, but the prospects and refuges are evident in this new environment for Kent.

This composition has the viewer facing Manana Island that is adjacent to Monhegan. In the distance, creating a barrier between the sky and the ocean is a mountainous ridge. This land mass likely represents the coast of Maine that is roughly ten miles from Monhegan.

11 Cathy Newman, "Monhegan Island," *National Geographic Magazine,* July 2001, accessed November 2, 2012, http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/data/2001/07/01/html/fulltext5.html. 12 Harris and Lyon, "Landscapes en plein air on Maine's Midcoast."

Portions of Manana obstruct the viewer's line of sight, but the rocks form a valley in the middle of the artwork to allow clear visibility. More than likely, *Harbor, Monhegan* reflects the idea that Kent was content in his new surroundings because there is a generous amount of sunlight on Monhegan and Manana islands, while the main land is masked in shadow. This painting shows that Kent felt more comfortable that he had the freedom to venture back to the main land with little stress. Kent would in fact leave Monhegan for short amounts of time during his tenure until 1910.

Another important biological need that is addressed in the prospect-refuge theory is the need for exploration.[16] Exploring is a basic biological action, as humans observe and seek out ways to use the land to their advantage. It could be claimed that this is heightened for a landscape artist, as he or she should intimately understand the environment that they are attempting to recreate in order to be successful in their task. The element of exploration with the possibility of discovery provides a constant source of satisfaction.[17] It was documented that Kent was very engaged with the environment that he was painting, as he would paint from the cliffs, toting along his supplies. The photograph taken of Kent painting on the rocks at Blackhead demonstrate how engaged he became in his surroundings when working on a landscape. (Figure 2) *Rocks, Monhegan* is an example of the type of painting that might result from Kent's inclusion into the environment.

This oil on canvas painting from 1906 focuses on the rocks that border the ocean. The viewer is positioned at a higher elevation and is looking down at the slope of the rocks and into the ocean. The position of the viewer is a prospect, as he or she is able to see a great distance into the ocean with the cliffs serving as a refuge. The bluff acts as a barrier that shelters the viewer by separating them from the ocean, which appears to have turbulent waters. The rocks can also shelter the viewer from other potential dangers, such as an unwanted intruder.

In one of his early landscapes from 1907, *Maine Coast,* Kent exhibits a snowy hillside enveloped by pine trees. (Figure 3) In the distant, right portion of the painting, a boat travelling on the ocean can be distinguished. There are many prospects that are easy to classify in

13 Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape,* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 73. 14 Jay Appleton, "Prospects and Refuges Revisited," *Landscape Journal* 3.2 (1984): 96.
15 *It's Me, O Lord,* 118. 16 *The Experience of Landscape,* 71. 17 Ibid, 187.

this oil on canvas work. The high elevation that is created by the hillside can be considered a prospect, as it would afford a person to see great distances. The visible ocean is also a prospect, according to Appleton, because even though it appears to have an end point, it is commonly understood that the ocean goes on for a great distance. The choice made by Kent to portray a daytime winter scene is significant as it adds another prospect to the artwork. Light is considered a prospect, as it allows for greater visibility, and by making the decision to depict sun shine on a snowy ground, Kent has enhanced the bright environment. The light from the sun, which cannot be directly observed is visible through the clouds, enhances the whiteness of the snow and increases the ability to see.[18] The ship, although difficult to determine the details about the vessel, represents both prospect and refuge symbols. The mast and the sails are the promise of a prospect as they reach up towards the sky, while the hull of the ship is the refuge against the sea.[19]

Refuges are often indicated by their ability to provide shelter. Appleton states that, "When we talk of a 'refuge' we may mean, on the one hand, a hiding-place screening us from a hostile observer, or a cottage sheltering us from the real adversities of the weather or, on the other, a sense of being enclosed, over shadowed, protected by some ineffective barrier."[20] In landscapes, a concave environment that does not allow the subject to be visible often represents a refuge.[21] From the vantage point Kent created in *Maine Coast,* 1907, the landscape is mostly seen as inclining up towards the hill that sits in the center of the painting. However, in this painting the clustering of trees provides an area of refuge and shows that there are slopes in the landscape before reaching the apex of the land.

Kent's artworks prior to his first journey to Monhegan Island were not always prospect dominant. In the summer of 1903, Kent assisted Abbott Handerson Thayer in creating his work in Dublin, New Hampshire.[22] Most of the art that he created at this time was not his own, but with the encouragement of Thayer, he began to produce his own paintings. He began developing a body of work in 1903 that included paintings such as *Dublin Pond* and *A New England Landscape.*[23] (Figure 4) While *Maine Coast* exhibited a balance of prospect and refuge

18 *The Experience of Landscape,* 109. 19 Ibid, 103. 20 Ibid, 83. 21 Ibid, 107-108. 22 Jake Milgram Wien, ed, *Rockwell Kent: The Mythic and the Modern,* (Manchester, VT: Hudson Hills Press, 2005), 162. 23 Ibid, 9.

in the composition, *A New England Landscape* contained an imbalance of prospects and refuges.

In this oil on canvas painting, the viewer is inserted onto a hill during a sunny day. This positioning of the observer is evident due to the low elevation in the rest of the artwork. The higher elevation on which the spectator is situated allows for an extended quantity of land to be seen, but due to the scarce amount of protection or refuge in the vicinity of the viewer, the viewer is at risk of being seen. The few, visible trees in the area prevent this look-out point from being a true prospect as there is little opportunity to see without being seen.

The sparse clouds depicted allow for the sun to appear and illuminate the landscape. In the background, there is some use of shadow, but the majority of the area is enveloped by sunlight. The portion of the painting that is closest to the foreground and the observer is darkened by the shadows of the sun. This is an intriguing combination of prospect and refuge, as the light is a characteristic of a prospect and darkness is typically a refuge.[24]

This could be reflective of what was occurring in Kent's life, just as his works from Monhegan allude to what events were happening during the time that particular piece was created. Kent was apprenticing for a successful artist and as previously mentioned, was not initially focused on creating artwork of his own. When analyzing this from a metaphorical aspect, Kent emerged from the shadows, if you will, of a more successful artist to attempt a career of his own. Where he stands now, there are not a lot of positive events occurring, as he is just beginning, but he is aware that there is the prospect of accomplishment in the distance.

It was the island fishermen that caught Kent's attention and helped him recognize his feelings of discontent. In a letter to Robert Henri, Kent comments on this particular group of individuals: "I love the fishermen here. I never in my life saw such a fine kindhearted set of people. I'd like to be one of them."[25] In his autobiography, Kent explicitly mentions he envied the fishermen and the dignity that they possessed from performing manual labor with the land.[26] Kent came up with the practical solution of engaging in his own manual labor. It should also be mentioned that another possible reason he began taking on extra work at this time was due to a lack of funds. Either way, this work acted as a way for him to support himself in addition to satisfying his desire for adequacy.

Due to Monhegan's remoteness, there were not many job options. Kent first took up well drilling with a local, Hiriam Cazallis.[27] This job entailed either swinging a sledgehammer repeatedly at a nail held by Hiriam or vice versa. When discussing his new found employment, Kent had this to say: "...I now felt myself to be no longer a mere spectator but an integral part...an indigenous inhabitant by natural right. I earned my living. I belonged. It is a great, proud feeling – to belong!"[28] In this statement, Kent himself recognizes how through his involvement with the land he has a greater feeling of significance. Beyond his work as a well driller, he would occasionally clean out privies for ten dollars a day and later he became what he envied, a lobsterman.

He served as a sternman, an assistant to Hiriam's brother, George, beginning in 1907. Kent's artwork reflected this change in occupations. His subject matter began to be filled with scenes of lobstermen and fishermen laboring on the sea. His oil on canvas, *Toilers of the Sea,* from 1907 is an example of Kent's changing interests. (Figure 5) This work shows fishermen on their boats in the process of catching their lobsters for the day. The boat closest to the viewer is positioned in the center and depicts a lobsterman pulling his net from the ocean, while his sternman struggles with the oars against the ocean's waves. According to Appleton, movement, whether it is achieved or imagined, is an important aspect of participating in the surrounding landscape.[29] It would not be a peculiar assumption to presume that Kent's active participation in the act of lobstering assisted him when he began to imagine the scene that would soon fill his blank canvas.

The decision to position the boat so close in the foreground gives the illusion that this prospect is attainable. The second boat in this painting, referred to as a dory due to its narrow, flat bottom, high bow, and flaring sides, is much more active, as it breaks the horizon line created by the ocean. With the vantage point that Kent uses for this second boat, it seems that he is alluding to a desire for a more physical interaction with the sea, as it is battling the oncoming waves.

Kent later commented that he lobstered with George Cazallis more to keep Cazallis company than for the assistance he provided.[30] Therefore, Kent received the satisfaction he obtained through physical labor, but the presence of the second boat and its placement in the composition could represent his desire for more. His desire would later

24 *The Experience of Landscape,* 82. 25 *Call of the Coast,* 110. 26 *It's Me, O Lord,* 122. 27 *It's Me, O Lord,* 123-124. 28 Ibid, 126. 29 *The Experience of Landscape,* 119.

be satisfied when he began lobstering with Mansfield "Manse" Davis, another well-known fishermen on the island. Kent stepped in for Manse when his regular partner was injured prior to the lobstering season. The job of working on Manse's boat was much more demanding than working on George's vessel, mainly due to the fact that George was the only individual on the island to have a one-cylinder marine engine on his boat alleviating much of the demanding rowing of the oars.[31] While Kent worked to push and pull the oars as Manse hauled and rebaited the traps, he also kept the lobsterman company. This companionship differed from the one he had with George because Manse held opposing views from Kent on almost every topic that was discussed: politics, religion, labor, and even Kent's vegetarianism.[32] As events throughout Kent's life haveshown, he was a very strong willed and freethinking individual.[33] The ability to debate and discuss what was on his mind without being judged only added to the attraction that lobstering possessed.

The surroundings that lobstering provided became a prospect and a refuge for Kent. While out to sea, he was able to reach multiple vantage points without much worry about objects obstructing his view: scenes that he would not obtain while on the island. Also, the act of lobstering and the dory provided refuge not only from the ocean but also from living a life of poverty, as this was Kent's main source of income at this time. The ocean provided a daily routine that consisted of "...were days of hard work, with all the excitement of a new and dangerous vocation. I liked the cold. It was stimulating. It became an obsession to me."[34]

During this time, Kent also began to build a personal home on the island.35 Up to this point, Kent was able to find shelter by living at the Inn on the island, but this endeavor to have his own home shows his desire to have a more permanent place on Monhegan. Kent did not originally intend to build the house himself, but due to constant delays, he took on the operation using his architectural knowledge from Columbia.[36]

---

30 *It's Me, O Lord,* 131. 31 Ibid, 131-132. 32 Ibid, 146. 33 In Newfoundland, just to provoke the rumors that he was a Communist, he started flaunting German memorabilia. 34 Rockwell Kent and Carl Zigrosser, *RockwellKentiana: Few Words and Many Pictures,* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1933), 11. 35 *It's Me, O Lord,* 131-136. 36 *RockwellKentiana: Few Words and Many Pictures,* 133. 37 "An Interview with Rockwell Kent Conducted by Paul Cummings at Austable Forks, New York, Febrauary 26-27, 1969," 12.

Kent did not stop at building his own home. Over the years on Monhegan Island, he built five of the houses on the island, including two of the first homes with modern plumbing.[37]

Kent's permanent connection with the land through the building of his personal home and the homes of others is reflected in his subject matter. On several occasions, like the artists before him, he chose to depict Monhegan village. *Monhegan Village, Maine: Morning* from 1907 is a prime example. This oil on canvas does not appear to have been composed on Monhegan. It appears to have been created from a vantage point on the smaller Manana Island, which sits adjacent to Monhegan Island. This is due to the geographical features and composition of the buildings on Monhegan. *Monhegan Village, Maine: Morning* states that it was created in the morning, but if it were indeed created to mimic the morning scenery, the shadowing in the foreground would be wrong. Manana Island is to the west of Monhegan, meaning the sun would rise over Monhegan and would gradually set behind Manana. The shadow in the foreground, in the shape of a sitting figure, would only be possible were the sun behind him or her, at sunset. The incorrect use of shadowing for the indicated time of day can also be seen in the figures and houses on the island. None of this information means this artwork should be discounted; if anything, it says that there was a modest quality to the village that Kent wanted this work to express.

This painting provides insight as to how Kent viewed Monhegan. The fact that the village takes up the vast majority of the horizon alludes to the fact that he saw it as a prospect. By placing the island in a perspective where the surrounding ocean could be seen, this indicates how this small patch of land served as a refuge from the ocean; however, it is important to remember that the ocean also symbolizes prospect, as previously mentioned. While there is no visible foliage on the island to provide refuge, the dwellings serve that same purpose. The largest building, almost centrally located in the painting, is the inn where Kent resided until he built his home; however, Kent did not include his newly built home in the composition, which would be just over the right hillside if he was accurate on his building locations.

The foreground of this oil on canvas is populated with trees and shrubbery that provide a refuge for the viewer; however, the area closest to the observer is not densely covered, which allows for him or her to view the island and be seen. Both Manana and Monhegan Islands are elevated pieces of land. In this composition, it appears that they are

of equal height from the position that that the viewer is in. This means that both locations function as prospects because of their raised elevations, while the ocean being placed in a lower lying valley reinforces its symbolism as a refuge.

In a 1969 interview with Paul Cummings, Kent explained that the foremost thing that interested him in those early days was working as a common laborer, specifically as a carpenter and a lobsterman in a two man dory for two years: "It's had more influence on my whole life and way of thinking than anything I ever did, outside of painting itself - working on Monhegan and living among those people as one of themselves; getting to know working people instead of dilettantes like picture painters - this was more to me than anything else in my life."38 While Kent was finding purpose through labor and taking steps towards settling on the island, he was also making connections with the local community. A remote village such as Monhegan is not always one to welcome visitors, or "rusticators" as they are commonly referred to on the island.39 However, Kent established himself within the village and gained acceptance among the people. Kent took to participating in the almost daily softball game that took place in the open field near the lighthouse. This game united artists, the fishermen, and others who inhabited the island. It was through this initial contact with the fishermen that Kent mentions he was introduced to the island men and began to know them, and it was from this that he grew envious of them and the strength they possessed.40

Kent's interaction with the community is well documented in the Rockwell Kent papers housed in the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. Photographs taken by the artist while on the island record the interaction he had with the residents of Monhegan. An example of this is shown in photos taken of a wedding ceremony that took place on the island in August of 1906. It is not only his photographs that show Kent's growing involvement with the Monhegan residents. Kent has also produced several paintings that reference his interaction with the village and its people.

One of Kent's paintings involving the community was completed

38 "An Interview with Rockwell Kent Conducted by Paul Cummings at Austable Forks, New York, Febrauary 26-27, 1969," 13. 39 Colin Woodard, *The Lobster Coast: Rebels, Rusticators, and the Struggle for a Forgotten Frontier,* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004): 17. 40 *It's Me, O Lord,* 121-122. 41 *Rockwell Kent: The Mythic and the Modern,* 33-34. 42 *Rockwell Kent: An Anthology of His Works,* 22. 43 Ibid, 24-26.

in what he believed would be his final year on Monhegan. *Down to the Sea* is an oil on canvas that was completed in 1910. (Figure 6) The work is composed of a group of villagers saying farewell to the fishermen as the boats float idly in the background. The work was originally titled *Fisherman's Farewell,* but Kent changed the name after reading a passage from Psalms 107. The portion that inspired him states, "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters."41 While living on Monhegan, Kent took a trip off the island in 1908 to get married to Kathleen Whiting, a relative of one of his former mentors, Abbott Handerson Thayer.42 Not long after the nuptials, Rockwell Kent began an affair with one of the women on Monhegan. Kathleen did not discover the indiscretion until 1909, when she promptly returned to her parent's home in Berkshire, Massachusetts.

The following year, Kathleen made the stipulation that if they were going to remain married Kent must leave Monhegan Island.43 Kent granted this request and left in December of 1910. The traits *Down to the Sea* possesses gives the impression of it serving almost as a farewell artwork or a personal reminder of what Monhegan came to mean to him.

This work is very prospect heavy in its symbolism associated with the features Kent employs mainly due to its perspective, use of light and shadow, and compositional arrangement. The angle that this work is portrayed from suggests that the viewer watches this interaction occur from a distance. The people that are the main focus of this painting are standing on an elevated ground level. This can be determined because of the small groups of people that are visible in the lower right portion of the composition. The ground line severs their bodies around hip level, suggesting that they are farther from the viewer and on lower ground. This places the land in an area that represents a prospect; however, this can be analyzed even further. There is a shadow cast on a majority of the land in the foreground. This is then abruptly interrupted to place the villagers in sunlight.

This use of light emphasizes the villagers of the island serving as a prospect for Kent. In the center of the composition, the masts from six ships are visible. Their vertical orientation is regarded as a prospect, as they are directed toward the sky. The close orientation of the masts creates an almost halo affect that encompasses the central group of villagers. To the right of this main group, almost in the shadows, is a man playing with a border collie. This is said to be Rockwell Kent and

his own dog.44 This adds to the idea that Kent is among the villagers, but he already senses the strain of separation.

It should be mentioned that Kent likely created this scene from his imagination or witnessed it at another time of day. The villagers are bidding their loved ones and fellow villagers farewell before they cast off to sea. As lobstering is the primary fishing that is performed on Monhegan, it is likely that these individuals pictured are the lobstermen of the island. The problem regarding the time of day is that the majority of lobstermen start to sea very early in the morning, often before dawn, in order to get their catch and have the rest of the day to perform other necessary duties.45 It is possible that these individuals are greeting the lobstermen upon their return, but it is very unlikely for lobstermen to return as a group if they lobster individually. In this situation, it is not about portraying an accurate scene but creating a composition that best represents the emotions Kent was experiencing.

Kent's departure from Monhegan was not as permanent as he believed, as he would return to the island during the summer of 1917. Oddly enough, 1917 was an unproductive summer for Kent in terms of his art. He wrote that the island was "too beautiful to paint."46 During this summer, he did not have the peace or the carefree life that he had previously possessed while there. This time he had several members of his family accompanying him, which he recounts as being annoying.47 Upon his subsequent departure from Monhegan, he ventured to Fox Island, Alaska, with his son, Rockwell III, where he lived from the summer of 1918 till winter of 1919.48 In addition to traveling to Fox Island, Kent would eventually travel to Tierra del Fuego, France, Ireland, and Greenland before making a final return to Monhegan Island in the spring of 1947.

During this thirty-year period, Kent was not always traveling to remote locations. He was often living close to New York and focusing on promoting and selling his artwork.49 According to Appleton, "Most are still able to live in an urban setting because they find aspects of it that closely resemble their prospect-refuge nature."50 Kent was able to do this successfully for small increments of time, but clearly, he did not find

---

44 *Rockwell Kent: The Mythic and the Modern,* 33-34. 45 *RockwellKentiana: Few Words and Many Pictures,* 11. 46 *Rockwell Kent on Monhegan,* 24. 47 Ibid, 25. 48 *Rockwell Kent: The Mythic and the Modern,* 164. 49 *It's Me, O Lord,* 245-254 and 273-278. 50 *The Experience of Landscape,* 174. 51 "An Interview with Rockwell Kent Conducted by Paul Cummings at Austable Forks, New York, Febrauary 26-27, 1969," 16.

it completely satisfying since he was an avid traveler to largely under populated areas that shared similar characteristics with Monhegan.

After his initial visit to Monhegan Island, Kent also discovered a new way to earn money: illustrating. In 1916, Kent began to regularly submit comical illustrations for publications such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Vanity Fair* under the pseudonym, Hogarth, Jr.51 A decade later, in 1926, Kent was hired by William Kittredge to create woodblock printing illustrations for *Moby Dick.52* Kent had great success through illustrating and later made images for *Paul Bunyan* and *Canterbury Tales,* in addition to his own publications.

In the book, *Monhegan: The Artist's Island,* the author states that with all of Kent's extensive traveling, it was as if he kept on searching for another Monhegan.53 If this is indeed true, it is possible that Kent failed in his quest, for he returned to the island again in 1947. At this point, his third wife, Shirley "Sally" Johnstone, accompanied him on the voyage. They did not initially plan to take up residency on the island again, but in the winter of 1948, Rockwell Kent purchased and repaired the house he had built for himself on the island.54 Unlike Kent's trip to the island in 1917, this period of time saw Kent producing work. Kent created little work in the six-year time frame before he left the island once again in 1953.

A painting that Kent did complete while still on the island is the *Wreck of the D.T. Sheridan.* (Figure 7) This oil on canvas from around 1949 depicts the tugboat, D.T. Sheridan, that landed on the shores of Monhegan Island after losing track of its position in dense fog and running upon the rocks on November 5, 1948.55 It is apparent that his artistic style changed over the years with a crisper application of paint and a wider ranging color palette that included very strong blues. The structure of the composition also shifted. This painting has been referred to as one of his most haunting late works.56

When analyzed through prospect-refuge theory, it is possible to infer that Kent was commenting on the power that this nature possessed: the same nature that he had admired for so many years.

---

52 *Distant Shores: The Odyssey of Rockwell Kent,* 33-35. 53 Jane Curtis and Frank Lieberman, *Monhegan: The Artist's Island,* (Camden, ME: Down East Books, 2001), 171. 54 *Rockwell Kent: The Mystic and the Modern,* 167. 55 Gregory P. Hinshaw et al., *Randolph County,* (Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 113. 56 *Call of the Coast,* 84.

The hull of a ship is considered to be the refuge portion of the ship, and here, the hull of the tugboat is the central focus of this composition as it lies on its side, rusted, and immersed in water. This contradicts the belief that this portion of the vessel might be able to provide shelter, as it failed for the crew of the D.T. Sheridan. The saturated yellow that is visible just above the horizon line created by the ocean, leads one to believe that this is where the prospect lies, as that is where the light is. There are three seagulls positioned on the top of the stationary hull, while the two gulls to the right are in the process of landing on the carcass of the boat, and the remaining two are making their way from the ocean to the hull. Even though doves are commonly thought of as the bird that represents rebirth, it is likely that the white bird indigenous to Monhegan Island, the seagull, serves the same purpose in this composition. Another possibility is that the seagulls represent scavengers, as they have appeared at the ship to investigate what is left of the remains. This may have been reflective of Kent's personal thoughts at the time, as he was around 67 when he created *Wreck of the D.T. Sheridan.*

On July 9, 1953, Sally Moran was presumed to have drowned in the ocean, while staying in Kent's cottage during his absence from the island.57 Moran often sat as a model for many of Kent's studies and became a good friend to him. Her death is believed to have noticeably affected Kent because this same year, he permanently departed the island, never to return.58 Others hypothesize that the islanders were no longer as friendly towards Kent after his hearing with Senator Joseph McCarthy regarding his associations with Communism and that he felt he had finally outstayed his welcome.59 Either theory is possible, or it could have been a combination of the two. Either way, Kent was aware he was leaving and just as in 1910, he made one last painting on Monhegan Island.

*Village at Night* from around 1953 is widely recognized as Kent's farewell to the island before his departure.60 (Figure 8) This scene is in stark contrast to the *Wreck of the D.T. Sheridan* or even the earlier *Monhegan Village, Maine: Morning.* A blanket of streaked cloud cover slowly looms over the darkened village, only illuminated by the glowing lanterns placed outside select houses. The dwellings appear to be mere

57 "Woman Vanishes at Summer Home of Rockwell Kent," *Cedar Rapids Gazette,* July 12, 1953, 1. 58 *Call of the Coast,* 84. 59 *It's Me, O Lord,* 498-499. 60 *Monhegan: The Artist's Island,* 172.

outlines, as from the distance and the darkness, it has become too difficult to make any distinctions about their characteristics. What was once considered to be a refuge no longer has the inviting welcome of a shelter. The composition of this scene still suggests that the village is the refuge, while the viewer is positioned in a spot of prospect, as he or she is able to see such a great distance. It is as if Kent recognizes what this place has meant to him, but he realizes the curtain must fall on this portion of his life as well. Unlike *Down to the Sea,* there are no people present. It is assumed that they are there within the houses, but they are not visible to the viewer. These factors contribute to the work's overall meaning, as the main light source is over the horizon, off to the sea. Even after his permanent departure from the island, it is clear that Monhegan Island was still on Kent's mind. In 1955, two years after he said good-bye to Monhegan, he created *Maine Lobsterman.* This oil on canvas features a single lobsterman rowing his dory into the harbor while individuals look out to the sea atop of the bluff. The viewer is standing on a rock as well, looking upon the lobsterman. This composition is prospect heavy as the viewer is on elevated ground and has a large sight of visibility. The scene is very bright with the light from the sun shining out from the ocean towards the island, emphasizing not only the lobsterman, but the observers as well.

Often times, lobstermen will not fish by themselves because of the potential risks that come with the job.61 The lobsterman is fishing alone in this composition. It also appears that there is nothing in his basket, meaning that he was not successful in catching anything for the day. While this is possible, this is highly unlikely. Finally, the style of boat is inaccurate to the time period *Maine Lobsterman* was painted in. Dory boats were the traditional style of boat used in lobstering around the early 20th century, but in 1910, small motors became a popular addition to lobster boats as they increased the distance the lobstermen could fish in the ocean.62 By 1955, motorized lobster boats were a common staple for the typical lobsterman. Kent would have observed this on his return to the island in 1947; however, he chose to depict a more personal memory. With the changes that have been made to the scene, it is possible that the lobsterman is Kent himself. This would not be the first time he included himself in his own work, as he depicted himself in *Down to the Sea.* Kent was vocal in discussing how much being involved with lobstering meant to him, and he reinforced this by creating this painting after his departure.

Throughout Kent's life, he recounted the influence Monhegan Island had on him and his career on several occasions. Even though Kent's comments help to solidify Monhegan's place in the artist's history, more can be analyzed through the artwork he produced. The saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words," is certainly true in regards to art history and is applicable in this situation. By analyzing Kent's paintings using Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, a timeline begins to emerge that reflects how Kent perceived his present environment and the events that occurred within that environment. Overall, it can be determined that from the selection of paintings created on Monhegan Island, Rockwell Kent had a close connection with the location that set the bar for what he would look for in his future artistic journeys: a small, working community, a preferably cold region, isolation, and a picturesque landscape. In essence, Kent continuously attempted to duplicate his experience on Monhegan Island, Maine.

61 *The Lobster Coast: Rebels, Rusticators, and the Struggle for a Forgotten Frontier,* 21. 62 "Evolution of the Maine Lobsterboat," Maine Boats, Homes & Harbors, accessed April 15, 2013, http://www.maineboats.com/online/boat-features/evolution-maine-lobsterboat.